

Vita Muir to Appropriations Committee – February 17, 2017

Funding awarded in the state budget to cultural organizations is given under the rubric “line items” aka “Directed Local Funds.” Words are powerful and these words are misleading. When you think of line items, the average person thinks of Federal earmarks, favors for the home districts of legislators in exchange for their votes. Pork. That is not at all what these so called line items are.

Nor for that matter are they directed locally. Programs may be ‘recommended’ for funding by a legislator but, they must be applied for annually by nonprofits and are never guaranteed – resulting in fiscal uncertainty. It is the Appropriations Committee that, in effect, directs these funds. Underscoring that cultural institutions are lines that can easily be erased, is the fact that the Office of the Arts ITSELF is included in the state budget as a “line item” (incorrectly labeled in this year’s budget as the Arts Commission)

I suggest that cultural institutions now labeled “lines items” be grouped under what the formerly robust and now defunct CT Commission on the Arts used to call Basic Cultural Resources, because that is what they are. Arts and culture foster imagination and ingenuity. These drive invention and invention is what ultimately drives the economy.

Now here’s what happens to those caught in the current system: if you are approved for a “line item” you are not allowed to apply for funding from the Office of the Arts. BUT with these programs trivialized as pet projects, they are easily disposed of in hard times. In our case it took 20 years and the efforts of two veteran lawmakers for the Litchfield Jazz Festival to be “awarded” a \$50K “line item.” BUT we never received 50K. Budget workarounds by the governor’s office allowed our first award to be cut to \$46K before we ever saw any of it. That amount of money is not too shabby, surely, but it represents a mere 12% of the cost of the Festival. This year, that amount was cut

to 29K (listed in error in the governor's budget at 42K) and will not be fully paid out for last summer's expenses until April at the earliest.

With this \$29K and hundreds of thousands more raised by ticket sales and other fundraising, the Festival produced 2 full days and evenings chock full of events and broke even—a dozen world class jazz concerts, a Jazz Brunch, art, craft, & food exhibits, family activities, artist talks and student concerts. Without it, a first class event which draws 5,000 people to Litchfield County every summer and was twice named “One of the Hundred Top Events in the US & Canada” will run in the red and may not be able to carry on in future years. It is worth noting is that half our visitors come from outside CT and as far away as New Zealand.

Here's the choice: Decrease the State budget by 29K and lose a 3 million dollar tourism bump that it and its related programs create--or keep this award in place. Better yet give it the \$50K it worked so hard to deserve.

Thank You

Vita Muir, Founder and Executive/Artistic Director, Litchfield Performing Arts and the Litchfield Jazz Festival